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SUBJECT: IDF REPLACES BEIT IBA CHECKPOINT, PALESTINIANS

NOTE A SMALL BUT WELCOME CHANGE

REF: 08 JERUSALEM 2200

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 b, d.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On March 15, the IDF dismantled the Beit Iba checkpoint west of Nablus and replaced it with a new checkpoint about two kilometers away (reftel). ConGen contacts reported that permits are not currently required at the new checkpoint, resulting in some easing of north-south travel around Nablus. Local Palestinians characterized the removal as a small but welcome change in the broader context of the IDF's restriction regime in the West Bank. No changes were reported on the network of other checkpoints surrounding Nablus. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The IDF removed the Beit Iba checkpoint west of Nablus on March 15, according to ConGen contacts. This checkpoint controlled commercial and residential access on the northwest side of the city. At the same time, the IDF opened a new checkpoint approximately two kilometers west on Route 57 (reftel). The new checkpoint controls access in and out of Nablus and traffic on the main north-south highway, Route 60. EconOfs visited the new checkpoint on March 12 and confirmed that a new guard tower, overhead lighting, and more concrete road barriers had been added to the site.

A Good Thing, if Conditions Remain

¶3. (SBU) OCHA and Palestinian Civil Affairs contacts report that, during the first 24 hours of operation at the new checkpoint, permits were not required (as they were at Beit Iba) and only "random" inspections occurred. If the new checkpoint remains "normally open" and no new restrictions are added in the area, access in and out of Nablus will be eased somewhat. Other checkpoints surrounding Nablus remain in place, including the Huwarra checkpoint south of the city that controls movement between Nablus and Ramallah and other points to the south. (Note: Movement between Nablus and the Jordan Valley is also unaffected by this change and remains controlled by the Hamra, Ma'ale Efrayim, and Tayasir checkpoints. The two Israeli policemen killed on March 15 near the settlement of Masu'a on Route 90 in the Jordan Valley were on the other side of these checkpoints from Nablus. End Note.)

Potential Humanitarian Pitfalls

¶4. (SBU) The new checkpoint lies on a narrow, poorly maintained stretch of road connecting north-south routes around Nablus and lacks a humanitarian lane for emergency vehicles. OCHA contacts report that the new checkpoint will

operate between the hours of 05:00 and 24:00 local and will be completely closed for five hours each night. The nighttime closure may prevent emergency medical cases from Tulkarem and Qalqiliya from reaching Nablus hospitals.

Palestinian Reactions

15. (C) Head of PA Civil Administration Hussein al-Sheikh told PolSpec that the removal of Beit Iba is a "good step," but noted no net reduction in the restriction regime, as a new checkpoint had been installed in its place. Nablus Governor Jamal al-Muhaysin told PolOff on March 16 that the new checkpoint is open and vehicles are passing without delay, but that the removal of Beit Iba is not a long-term solution. "There are 600 checkpoints in the West Bank) it's not about one checkpoint, it's about the occupation," he said. The Deputy Chairman of the Nablus Chamber of Commerce characterized the change as "expanding the prison two kilometers."

Comment

16. (C) The important new development here is the relaxation of the permit requirement. If this remains in place, there will be some easing of movement in and out of Nablus. The relocation of the checkpoint from Beit Iba to the new location two kilometers away, in and of itself, will have no impact on the situation. End Comment.
WALLES